

Ultimate Responsibility

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The purpose of this article is to remind people about their responsibilities regarding the safety of themselves and the men and women working with them. As a supervisor or a subordinate, safety should always remain your top priority, especially when dealing with explosives.

Whenever you hear about a mishap involving safety, you often hear someone mention that somebody else was supposed to check to ensure items were safe, or "they said they installed the safety devices..."

About 10 years ago I learned that in the end, you are the one ultimately responsible for your personal safety. I was tasked to download BDU-33 practice bombs with a crew I had not previously worked with before. The team chief was an experienced loader, and I felt good about working with him. He safed the aircraft and we proceeded to download the bombs. When we got to the third bomb, I pulled the safety pin and held onto the bomb as he attempted to release it with the download tool. For no discernable reason, the bomb failed to release, and the team chief decided to proceed to another bomb, remarking that "we could come back to this one later."

I went to re-install the safety pin, and he stopped me saying, "Don't bother pinning it. It will only take a second to drop this other one."

I knew better, but he insisted so I reached over to hold the other bomb. Just as he went to download the other bomb, I heard a click ... it came from the previous rack ... the one I didn't put the pin back in. I quickly reached down, and caught the bomb by its tail. The nose of the bomb came less than an inch away from hitting the ground. We were lucky. I didn't realize how lucky until I looked down and discovered that the safety clip on the bomb's plunger was not installed. He hadn't safed the munitions prior to our downloading them, and here I was holding one between my legs, nose nearly striking the ground, less than an inch from being seriously injured or killed. Needless to say, it caught my attention.

For a long time, I was angry with him for not making sure things were safe, but now that I am older and wiser, I realize I should have been angry with myself. Even though he was supposed to have safed the aircraft, I should have checked to be sure the bomb was safe before even touching it, and I should have taken the few seconds to pin it even though I was told not to.

Ultimately, I was the only one truly responsible for my safety. That lesson has stuck with me, and as a result, I have not had a single incident resulting in injury or damage to equipment in over 10 years of service. As a weapon's load crew member, it is important to trust your team members to do a good job; but when it comes to my own safety, I always take a few minutes to double check. Whenever I get the urge to rush or cut a corner, I remember what it felt like to be that close to a catastrophe. There is not any job that needs to be done so fast that you do not have time for a second glance. Be safe! 